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News

## Cuts to balance budget

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By ANDREW J. BERNSTEIN, The Saratogian

Revised plan to compensate for likely loss of VLT aid

SARATOGA SPRINGS — With pressure mounting to pass a budget before Nov. 30, the City Council got its first glimpse of a newly revised spending plan at a workshop Monday evening.

In light of the possible

50 percent cut to state VLT-impact aid, Commissioner of Finance Kenneth Ivins Jr. is proposing to raise property taxes by 3.5 percent, cut nearly a million dollars in planned expenditures, including some jobs, and use \$850,000 from the city's reserves to maintain a balanced budget.

"There will be portions they like and portions they don't like," said Ivins, when asked what his colleagues would find when they studied the budget. "If I were in their shoes, I might not want to vote for it."

Although a vote on the budget was originally planned for a council meeting immediately after Monday's workshop, the council agreed that more time was needed to examine the budget before voting.

The council is scheduled to meet at 6:30 tonight and vote on the budget, although it is not clear if Ivins will have the three votes out of five needed to pass it.

To compensate for the loss of \$1.8 million in VLT aid, Ivins reduced the labor line in the Department of Public Works, likely leading to job cuts in that department; and kept several other employees who were expected to become full-time as part-time.

Ivins also imposed a wage freeze on non-union employees, including executive assistants, deputies and civil service department employees. In addition, Ivins' budget would require council approval to fill positions left vacant by attrition.

Ivins also noted that he budgeted a lesser amount of sales tax revenue, to move the city into line with revenue estimates suggested in state reports.

Commissioner of Accounts John Franck said that in the spirit of bailouts seen with increasing frequency on the national level, the council should use an additional \$546,000 from the city's \$4 million fund reserve to avoid a tax increase.

Commissioner of Public Works Skip Scirocco expressed concerns that the budget process was illegal because there was no public comment planned for the newest version of the budget, and warned that services would be affected if labor lines were cut.

"This is supposed to be one of the worst winters, and I'd hate to see all those vehicles in the DPW garage without anyone

to drive them," he said.

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